



INQUIRIES

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GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY

Bulletin No. 2 — Preliminary Estimates of Firearm Ownership and Possession
May 1975

MAIN FEATURES

The General Social Survey covered cities and towns with populations of 500 or more but excluded the whole of the Northern Territory. Preliminary estimates from the section of the survey on ownership and possession of firearms show that :

- In May 1975 there were 847,400 persons owning or possessing 1,354,700 firearms.
- Of those persons, 88.9% had at least one firearm in working order.
- Of those persons with at least one firearm in working order, 66.3% possessed ammunition, and sport was the most frequently given reason (64% of responses) for acquiring a firearm.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Introduction

During March, April and May 1975 the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted a large household sample survey designed to obtain data on a number of social topics. Topics covered in the survey were the composition and characteristics of families, with special emphasis on a comparison of one-parent and two-parent families; victims of certain types of crime; firearm ownership and possession; and away-from-home leisure-time activities. This bulletin contains preliminary results on the ownership and possession of firearms.

Survey Methodology

2. The survey was based on a multi-stage area sample of about 10,000 private dwellings (houses, flats,

etc.) and some non-private dwellings (hostels, boarding houses, etc.) and living quarters for live-in staff in hotels and motels, hospitals and educational institutions. The sample was drawn from cities and towns with populations of 500 or more in each of the six States and the Australian Capital Territory. The whole of the Northern Territory was excluded because of the effects of cyclone Tracy in Darwin in December 1974. The survey is estimated to cover more than 85 per cent of the Australian population. However it is likely that gun ownership rates in areas not covered by the survey are higher than those shown in this publication. Therefore, any estimate as to the total number of firearms and persons owning or possessing firearms in Australia should be made with caution.

3. Information was obtained from the members of selected households by carefully chosen and specially trained interviewers. Usually each household member was interviewed personally, but where this was not possible some information about an absent member was obtained from another responsible member of the household.

Scope

4. Within the geographic area covered, the survey included all persons aged 15 years and over except patients in institutions such as hospitals and sanatoria and prisoners in gaols, members of the permanent armed forces not living in private dwellings, and non-Australians who were touring or holidaying in Australia. Certain diplomatic personnel customarily excluded from census and estimated populations were also excluded from the survey.

Reliability of the estimates

5. Since the estimates are based on a sample, they

may differ from the figures that would have been obtained from a complete enumeration using the same questionnaires and procedures. An indication of the likely differences is given in the Technical note, page 6. Some figures in this bulletin have been replaced by the symbol (*), which denotes that the figure it replaces is subject to sampling variability too high for most practical purposes.

Rounding

6. Any discrepancies between totals and sums of components in the tables are due to rounding.

Related Publications

7. Other ABS publications which may be of interest include :

General Social Survey, Bulletin No. 1, Preliminary Estimates of Families, May 1975 (Reference No. 13.17)

All publications produced by the ABS are listed in *Publications of the Australian Bureau of Statistics* (Reference No. 1.8) which is available free of charge from any ABS office.

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Australian Statistician

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF PERSONS OWNING OR POSSESSING FIREARMS
AND THE NUMBER OF FIREARMS (b)

	<i>N.S.W. (a)</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>S.A.</i>	<i>W.A.</i>	<i>Tas.</i>	<i>Total (b)</i>
Number of persons owning firearms *('000)	301.5	241.4	137.4	82.4	53.2	31.5	847.4
Percent of total	35.6	28.5	16.2	9.7	6.3	3.7	100.0
Number of firearms ('000)	532.5	338.2	209.9	120.9	98.1	55.1	1,354.7
Percent of total	39.3	25.0	15.5	8.9	7.2	4.1	100.0
Average number of firearms per person owning or possessing a firearm	1.8	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.8	1.7	1.6

(a) Includes the Australian Capital Territory. (b) Excludes the Northern Territory and all localities with a population of less than 500 persons. See page 1, paragraph 2.

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF EACH TYPE OF FIREARM (b)
('000)

<i>Type of firearm</i>	<i>N.S.W. (a)</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>S.A.</i>	<i>W.A.</i>	<i>Tas.</i>	<i>Total (b)</i>
Rifle	335.2	178.9	146.4	82.9	54.8	27.6	825.9
Shotgun (c)	123.6	119.2	39.3	24.6	27.5	23.7	357.8
Air rifle	49.0	29.3	19.1	9.7	12.2	*	122.5
Pistol or revolver	24.7	*	*	*	*	*	48.5
Total	532.5	338.2	209.9	120.9	98.1	55.1	1,354.7

(a) Includes the Australian Capital Territory. (b) Excludes the Northern Territory and all localities with a population of less than 500 persons. See page 1, paragraph 2. (c) Includes combination rifle/shotgun.

* Subject to sampling variability too high for most practical purposes. See page 1, paragraph 5.

TABLE 3. PERSONS WHO OWN OR POSSESS FIREARMS WHO HAVE
AT LEAST ONE IN WORKING ORDER (b)
(per cent)

	<i>N.S.W. (a)</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>S.A.</i>	<i>W.A.</i>	<i>Tas.</i>	<i>Total (b)</i>
At least one in working order	88.1	89.6	85.7	89.8	95.2	91.8	88.9
None in working order	8.7	7.0	11.8	9.2	*	*	8.3
Not known or not stated	*	*	*	*	*	*	2.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Includes the Australian Capital Territory. (b) Excludes the Northern Territory and all localities with a population of less than 500 persons. See page 1, paragraph 2.

* Subject to sampling variability too high for most practical purposes. See page 1, paragraph 5.

TABLE 4. PERSONS WHO OWN OR POSSESS FIREARMS WITH AT LEAST ONE IN WORKING ORDER
BY SOURCE OF ACQUISITION OF FIREARMS (b)
(per cent)

Source of acquisition	N.S.W. (a)	Vic.	Qld	S.A.	W.A.	Tas.	Total (b)
Gift/bequest	21.6	21.2	21.0	23.5	18.2	26.4	21.5
Purchased from dealer	54.7	56.9	56.8	54.1	59.8	50.9	55.8
Purchased from someone other than a dealer	18.1	19.1	19.0	19.8	19.3	20.9	18.9
Other	5.6	*	*	*	*	*	3.8
Total (c)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Includes the Australian Capital Territory. (b) Excludes the Northern Territory and all localities with a population of less than 500 persons. See page 1, paragraph 2. (c) More than one source of acquisition could be specified.

* Subject to sampling variability too high for most practical purposes. See page 1, paragraph 5.

TABLE 5. PERSONS WHO OWN OR POSSESS FIREARMS WITH AT LEAST ONE IN WORKING ORDER
BY REASON FOR HAVING FIREARMS (b)
(per cent)

Reason for having firearms	N.S.W. (a)	Vic.	Qld	S.A.	W.A.	Tas.	Total (b)
Souvenir/antique collection	6.8	*	*	*	*	*	6.0
Sport	60.2	73.2	51.2	66.8	61.4	83.7	64.0
Protection of self or household	8.9	*	11.7	8.1	*	*	7.9
Protection of business	11.5	8.3	13.0	13.3	13.2	*	10.9
Part of job	*	*	*	*	*	*	3.2
Other	7.6	6.4	13.3	*	*	*	8.0
Total (c)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Includes the Australian Capital Territory. (b) Excludes the Northern Territory and all localities with a population of less than 500 persons. See page 1, paragraph 2. (c) More than one reason could be specified.

* Subject to sampling variability too high for most practical purposes. See page 1, paragraph 5.

TABLE 6. NUMBER OF PERSONS OWNING OR POSSESSING FIREARMS WITH AT LEAST
ONE IN WORKING ORDER BY AMOUNT OF AMMUNITION (b)
(per cent)

Amount of ammunition	N.S.W. (a)	Vic.	Qld	S.A.	W.A.	Tas.	Total (b)
None	26.2	22.5	26.9	23.4	23.8	21.4	24.7
1-9 rounds	8.4	11.1	8.1	*	*	*	8.8
10-49 rounds	17.0	20.6	20.5	19.9	24.5	31.2	19.9
50-99 rounds	15.3	14.0	11.0	14.1	13.8	13.0	13.9
100 or more rounds	24.3	23.8	21.3	26.5	25.5	18.5	23.7
Not known	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not stated	8.4	6.7	11.7	9.8	*	*	8.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Includes the Australian Capital Territory. (b) Excludes the Northern Territory and all localities with a population of less than 500 persons. See page 1, paragraph 2.

* Subject to sampling variability too high for most practical purposes. See page 1, paragraph 5.

TABLE 7. PERSONS OWNING OR POSSESSING FIREARMS BY AGE (b)
(per cent)

<i>Age in years</i>	<i>N.S.W. (a)</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>S.A.</i>	<i>W.A.</i>	<i>Tas.</i>	<i>Total (b)</i>
12 - 19	9.8	10.3	7.7	8.5	*	*	9.1
20 - 29	25.4	25.3	26.6	26.0	24.5	22.2	25.5
30 - 39	24.2	20.8	24.4	24.4	25.3	24.4	23.4
40 - 49	18.5	19.7	20.7	16.2	16.7	14.9	18.7
50 and above	21.7	23.2	20.3	25.0	28.9	30.3	23.0
Not known	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Includes the Australian Capital Territory. (b) Excludes the Northern Territory and all localities with a population of less than 500 persons. See page 1, paragraph 2.

* Subject to sampling variability too high for most practical purposes. See page 1, paragraph 5.

TABLE 8. PERSONS WHO OWN OR POSSESS FIREARMS IN WORKING ORDER
BY AGE WHEN THEIR FIRST FIREARM WAS OBTAINED (b)
(per cent)

<i>Age (in years) when a firearm was first obtained</i>	<i>N.S.W. (a)</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>S.A.</i>	<i>W.A.</i>	<i>Tas.</i>	<i>Total (b)</i>
0 - 13	16.2	14.9	19.9	12.3	*	17.2	15.4
14 - 15	15.0	14.0	12.6	13.0	*	*	13.8
16 - 17	22.6	14.1	21.8	24.0	25.0	30.6	20.6
18 - 19	16.4	21.3	15.9	13.3	16.5	*	17.2
20 - 39	25.3	32.8	27.4	34.5	37.2	25.8	29.5
40 and over	*	*	*	*	*	*	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

(a) Includes the Australian Capital Territory. (b) Excludes the Northern Territory and all localities with a population of less than 500 persons. See page 1, paragraph 2.

* Subject to sampling variability too high for most practical purposes. See page 1, paragraph 5.

TECHNICAL NOTE

Reliability of the estimates

Since the estimates in this statement are based on a sample, they may differ from the figures that would have been obtained from a complete census using the same questionnaires and procedures. One measure of the likely difference is given by the standard error, which indicates the extent to which an estimate might have varied by chance because only a sample, and not the whole population, was enumerated. There are about two chances in three that a sample estimate will differ by less than one standard error from the figure that would have been obtained from a comparable complete enumeration, and about nineteen chances in twenty that the difference will be less than two standard errors.

2. Space does not allow for the separate indication of the standard error of all estimates in this statement. For this reason a table of standard errors for general application to the estimates of **persons owning or possessing firearms** is given below. Although these figures will not give a precise measure of the standard error of a particular estimate they will indicate the order of magnitude. An example of the use of the table is: if the estimate obtained from a sample for N.S.W. is 100,000, the standard error is 8.9 per cent of the estimate, i.e. 8,900; this means that there are about two chances in three that the true figure is within the range 91,000 to 108,900 and about nineteen chances in twenty that this figure is between 82,200 and 117,800.

3. The standard errors of estimates of the **number of firearms** are about 25 per cent higher than the standard errors of estimates of the number of persons owning or possessing firearms, for estimates of the same size. An example of this is: if the estimate of the number of firearms obtained from the sample for N.S.W.

is 100,000 (the standard error of which is 11 per cent, i.e. 11,000) there are about two chances in three that the true figure is within the range 89,000 to 111,000 and about nineteen chances in twenty that this figure is between 78,000 and 122,000.

4. Standard errors as a percentage of the estimates are shown for Australia in the table below. The percentages show that, the smaller the estimate the higher is the relative standard error. Relatively small estimates are thus subject to such high standard errors (relative to the size of the estimate) as to detract seriously from their value for most reasonable uses. In the tables in this statement, estimates not considered sufficiently reliable have not been shown. Although figures for these small components can in some cases be derived by subtraction, they should not be regarded as reliable. The reliability of an estimated percentage depends on the reliability of both the numerator and denominator of the percentage. In general, however, any percentage shown in this publication will be subject to a percent standard error lower than that for the corresponding estimate (numerator).

5. The imprecision due to sampling variability, which is measured by the standard error, should not be confused with inaccuracies that may occur because of imperfections in reporting by interviewers, and respondents, and in office coding and processing. Inaccuracies of this kind are referred to as the non-sampling error, and they may occur in any enumeration, whether it be a full count or only a sample. Every effort is made to reduce the non-sampling error to a minimum by careful design of questionnaires; intensive training and supervision of interviewers and efficient operating procedures.

STANDARD ERRORS OF ESTIMATES - PERSONS (a)

Size of estimate (persons)	N.S.W.	Vic.	Qld	S.A.	W.A.	Tas.	Australia	
							Number	Per cent of estimate (b)
4,000						820		
6,000				1,260	1,266	996	1,692	28.2
10,000	2,570	2,410	2,040	1,640	1,640	1,270	2,220	22.2
20,000	3,740	3,400	2,920	2,340	2,340	1,780	3,200	16.0
30,000	4,650	4,170	3,600	2,880	2,880	2,160	3,960	13.2
50,000	6,150	5,350	4,700	3,750	3,750	2,750	5,200	10.4
100,000	8,900	7,600	6,700	5,300	5,300	3,800	7,500	7.5
200,000	13,000	10,600	9,600	7,600	7,600	5,400	10,800	5.4
300,000	16,200	13,200	12,000	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	13,500	4.5
500,000	24,000	17,000	16,000	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	16,000	3.2

(a) The standard errors of estimates of the number of firearms are about 25 per cent higher than the standard errors of estimates of the number of persons, for estimates of the same size. See page 6, paragraph 3. (b) In this publication, estimates with a standard error of more than 20 per cent have not been published. See page 6, paragraph 4.

n.a. — not applicable.



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